

Andalusia (Nicholas Biddle Estate)
.3 mile south of State Road
Andalusia
Bensalem Township
Bucks County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1248

HABS
PA,
9-ANDA,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS
HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ANDALUSIA

HABS No. PA-1248

(Nicholas Biddle Estate)

Location: .3 mile south of State Road, Andalusia, Bensalem Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Beverly, Pennsylvania-New Jersey Quadrangle,
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates:
18.503560.4434430

Present Owner and Occupant: James Biddle.

Present Use: Private residence.

Significance: The house is the work of Thomas U. Walter, architect of the Capitol Dome in Washington, D.C. He enlarged a smaller and earlier house to create this Greek Revival masterpiece. The house is one of the finest examples of the temple-form in the country, and is one of the few country seats left which still has its outbuildings. The architect's client and the owner of the house was Nicholas Biddle, the president of the Second Bank of the United States.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Dates of erection: The building of Andalusia occurred several times following the 1795 purchase of a farm, which included an old farmhouse. The dates are 1797-1798; 1806-1808; and 1836-1838.
2. Architects: Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1806-1808 work; Thomas U. Walter, 1836-1838 work.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1795, John Craig, a Philadelphia merchant with business connections in the Old World, purchased land that had been used as a farm. In 1811 Nicholas Biddle married the Craigs' daughter, Jane, and acquired Andalusia. The property has been in the possession of the Biddle family since that year.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: The people involved in the construction of the 1806-1808 additions were as follows:

Robert Adams- head carpenter

James Traquair- for work on an ornamental
chimney piece, a frieze and marble
work

William Barnes- for paint work on a striped
bedroom floor

5. Original plans and construction: Andalusia is composed of two or three earlier structures, including the one in the Federal style. It is not known if the original pre-1795 farmhouse is among the structures. In 1797, either a new house was built or the old farmhouse was altered. The work was completed the following year. In 1806 architect Benjamin Henry Latrobe added side bays and small wings to the house. The work was completed in 1808. From 1836 to 1838 new additions were incorporated in the house, forming the present pillared Greek Revival portico (south elevation) and the north elevation with end wings. The Latrobe additions were covered over by the new additions. Thomas U. Walter (1804-1887) was the architect for the new additions. The Greek Revival portico was modeled after the Hephaestum in Athens.

Andalusia was originally a country seat, composing of a main house, outbuildings and a farm. There were various kinds of outbuildings as well as other kinds of structures. They included the following: a recreational house (the Billiard Room); a playhouse, a bathing house; a laundry house; a milk house; a grotto; a gardener's house; a farmer's house; a laborer's house; a barn; a shad fishery; a steam engine house; the graperies and several ice houses.

6. Alterations and additions: Andalusia has not been radically altered since the construction of the 1836-1838 additions. However, modern necessities such as electricity, bathrooms, etc., have been added.
- B. Historical Context: Nicholas Biddle (1786-1844) was born to the prominent Biddle family of Philadelphia. In his youth he traveled extensively and had worked for the governments in London and Paris. In 1811, he married Jane Craig, a member of another prominent Philadelphia family. Biddle was for many years an active contributor to Port Folio, a literary journal of national prominence. He was also active in politics, and had served in the State Senate. From 1819 to 1823 he was a director of the Second Bank of the United States in Philadelphia, and from 1823 to 1839 he was a president of that bank.

Biddle was also an influential adviser on the designs of the Greek Revival structures in Philadelphia. He advised architects such as Strickland and Walter as to principles of classical architecture, suggestions and changes. Among the structures that Biddle was involved in their

designs were the Girard College, the Second Bank of the United States, and, of course, Andalusia. He had a deep interest in classical architecture. As a young man he visited Greece and her ancient temples.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The most prominent feature of the house is the imposing hexastyle Doric portico (south elevation). Good feeling of Greek originality is evident in the columns, entablature, and pediment.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The 2 1/2 story house is T-shaped and measures 94'-1" X 120'-2". The north elevation numbers 9 bays and the south (portico) elevation 6 bays.
2. Foundations: The foundations of the earlier portion of the house are rubble with a brick watertable on the exterior. The foundations of the later portions are also rubble, but have no watertable. All are coated with stucco.
3. Walls: The walls are laid up in brick. The exterior is covered with stucco with a sandstone tone. The stucco is scored to simulate stone. Wall fragments in the cellar of the earlier portion of the house show that the house had been finished with a coarse aggregate stucco of a gray tone prior to the 1836-1838 remodeling and enlargement.
4. Structural system, framing: The structural system consists of masonry bearing walls and wood framing. Some steel has been introduced into various floors, to stabilize the structure.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: The columns of the Doric portico are made of wood and brick. The portico floor was originally painted in black and white squares in imitation of marble paving. The entrance porch on the north elevation is classical. It is a four-columned structure with a gable roof and a 6-panel door with a fanlight. It is approached by a three-step stoop. Another gabled porch with two Doric columns and a four-step stoop is on the west elevation of the west wing; it is the entrance to the library. A stoop on the south wall of

the east wing has a rail which is used to hold a bell. Another stoop is on the south wall of the west wing. Bulkheads are located in the front portion of the house.

6. Chimneys: There are seven chimneys. Some have been covered with tin similar to that on the roof. A variety of terra cotta chimney pots have been added.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The front entrance doorway is Federal: a fanlight and paneled door and jamb. All other doors throughout the house are paneled.
 - b. Windows and shutters: There are three basic types of windows: 6 X 6, 6 X 12, and casements. The casements are employed on the attic windows, central part of the north elevation, and second and first floor bays. The 6 X 12 windows are on the first floor of the south portico. All other windows are 6 X 6. Shutters are used on the windows and on the north entrance doorway.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: All roofs are of gable form, with the exception of the roof over the north entrance doorway which is shed form. All roofs are covered with 12" tin plate with standing seams.
 - b. Cornices: Cornices are constructed of wood. A plain cornice is used throughout, except for the main cornice on the portico which is bracketed and ornamented in a classical manner.
 - c. Skylights: Skylights are used on the roof to give light to the servants' rooms.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There are four crawl spaces and nine cellar rooms. Four stairways provide accesses to the basement. Two crawl spaces are located in either the north or south portion of the house. A large number of rooms are located in the central portion of the house; others are in the west wing.
- b. First floor: The front north portion of the house has four rooms with an entrance hallway in the center. The central portion consists of five rooms, while the rear south portion has two rooms of nearly equal dimensions.

- c. Second floor: Second floor layout is similar to the first floor, except that it has a larger number of rooms.
 - d. Attic: Attic rooms are located in the central and rear south portions of the house only. There are four rooms in the central portion and two rooms and a closet space in the south portion. Both central and south portions have a central hallway.
2. Stairways: The main stair is open from the first floor to the attic, and closed down to the cellar. It is of open stringer type with decorative side brackets. The balusters are square with a routed decoration. Three balusters are on each tread. A half rail and a pilaster are employed on the opposite wall.

The service stair is rather steep, and employs winders at the first floor level.
 3. Flooring: Random-width board floors, probably pine.
 4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster walls and ceilings. Most walls have been covered with canvas. All surfaces are painted. Elaborate plaster and wood cornices are found only in the principal rooms. Ornamental pendants are on the ceilings of the library and the front parlors. The latter is also decorated with pilasters with ornate capitals.
 5. Doorways and doors: Doors are paneled in a variety of motifs, the principal one being a rather standard 6-panel door. Doors in the front parlors are larger, have 8 panels and are grained to simulate maple.
 6. Decorative features and trim: Mentioned previously are the plaster ornament in the principal rooms. Most exceptional are the library cases, made of wood, which is painted and decorated with gold leaf. Cabinets exhibit typical Greek Revival motifs (acroteria ornament on crown of case, etc.).
 7. Hardware: Box locks on all doors. They are of unusually high quality and are made of iron and brass, the latter being used for decoration purposes only. Most doors have original keys.
 8. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: Heating system is gas-fired hot water.
 - b. Lighting: The library and one of the parlors have original chandeliers which were manufactured by Thomire of Paris and purchased by Biddle on June 4, 1836.

- c. Kitchen equipment: There are a cooking stove and an oven in the kitchen. The former was manufactured by Bartleet and Reynolds of Philadelphia. The latter was manufactured by James H. Deas.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The main entrance is on the north elevation of the house facing toward the driveway. The 250-plus acre property is on the north bank of the Delaware River and runs about one mile long along the river. The "tout ensemble" includes other major houses of merit, including one by Napoleon LeBrun, and numerous outbuildings.
2. Outbuildings: See separate documentation for several outbuildings and a structure.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Bibliography:

Wainwright, Nicholas B. "Andalusia, Countryseat of the Craig Family and of Nicholas Biddle and His Descendants." The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Bibliography (No. 1, 1977):3-69.

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Summer 1974
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Fall 1983

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The 1974 project was jointly funded by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and anonymous donors. The project was under the supervision of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS. The field team consisted of Martin J. Rosenblum, project supervisor; John H. Barker (University of Oregon), student architect; and Stephen A. England (University of Cincinnati), student architect. Susan McCown, a HABS staff historian in the Washington, D.C. office, edited the written data in the Fall of 1983, for transmittal to the Library of Congress. The photographs were taken by Cortlandt V.D. Hubbard and by Jack E. Boucher.

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